

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Napolitano Stays On: Five Key Steps for DHS in the Next Administration

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The White House has announced that Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano will stay in her post as President Barack Obama begins his second term. While the decision is not terribly surprising, it is an important one. Secretary Napolitano's dedication to stay on will give her the opportunity to continue to improve the operation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—a task that will require a significant effort.

What DHS needs now is not a massive reorganization or dismantling but rather a strong strategic vision oriented around key priorities for the next four years. The Secretary will need to prioritize her focus on the areas of improvement that have the greatest need. As she begins her own second term, the Secretary of Homeland Security should guide DHS to focus on five critical priorities.

**1. Recapitalizing the Coast Guard.** Since 9/11, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) has seen its responsibilities increase significantly. But modernization of its forces has not kept pace. Many of its ships are operating beyond their expected service lives. For example, the USCG High Endurance Cutter fleet today, at an average age of 42.8 years, has exceeded its intended service life of 40 years.

It is critical that DHS find the resources necessary to recapitalize and modernize the fleet. In most cases, repairs and maintenance are simply not enough to keep the ships operational. Resources, however, continue to lag behind requirements, with the Coast Guard acquisition, construction, and improvement budget already absorbing significant cuts.

Under the leadership of Secretary Napolitano, DHS should dedicate the resources it needs to meet USCG fleet requirements for the next four years and beyond. This means completing the development of the National Security Cutter, the Offshore Patrol Cutter, and the Fast Response Cutter fleets, in order to replace aging legacy vessels.

Similarly, the Secretary should work to ensure that the USCG can

meet the needs of growing U.S. interests in the Arctic by working with Congress, in the immediate term, to address legislative impediments to leasing commercial icebreakers from foreign companies.

**2. Strengthening Intelligence, Counterterrorism, and Information Sharing.** DHS still finds itself mostly a customer of intelligence, with little ability to drive policy or protocol in this realm. It remains locked in a turf war with the Department of Justice over counterterrorism efforts and continues to be a minor player within the inter-agency. Napolitano should work to change this conflict to a functioning joint enterprise model.

One key step should include reducing the number of DHS fusion centers and stopping the states from being allowed to take 20 percent of Urban Areas Security Initiative funding intended for fusion centers. The reality is that DHS, states, and localities do not have the resources to run all 77 current fusion centers completely, and the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces are already more established and integrated into state and local communities.

Further, DHS should do more to ensure that state and local governments receive a seat at the table. The

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growing use of the cyber realm by terrorists requires a more robust and decentralized intelligence-gathering and counterterrorism enterprise that reaches beyond the purview of the federal government and brings all of the nation's resources and players to bear.

### **3. Rethinking Aviation**

**Security.** Aviation security should be integrated with U.S. counterterrorism operations so that their security measures and capacity to act against threats are synchronized in the most effective manner. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has made great strides in considering risk-based aviation screening. It needs to go further and accept the efficiencies that might come from allowing the private sector to participate in the Security Partnership Program and other similar programs.

At the same time, the TSA should work to further enhance Secure Flight, TSA PreCheck, and the Federal Flight Deck Officer Program in order to enhance and prioritize passenger screening and provide low-cost, high-utility aviation security measures.

**4. Reforming FEMA to Focus on Catastrophic Events.** In 2011, President Obama issued 242 federal disaster declarations—by far the most in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) history. This high operational tempo is

affecting FEMA's overall preparedness, keeping FEMA perpetually in a response mode and leaving little time and few resources for catastrophic preparedness. It also turns FEMA into a federal financing spigot, as state and local communities come to rely on federal disaster funds rather than securing the resources to aid their citizens in the event of a disaster.

FEMA needs to return to its traditional focus on disasters of a truly national and catastrophic scope rather than responding to every routine disaster throughout the United States.

In order to do this, efforts should be made to overhaul existing FEMA processes and procedures under the Public Assistance Grant program, ensure that FEMA becomes a 21st-century agency with 21st-century tools and technology, build a comprehensive national integrated planning system with shared all-hazard response plans, and better leverage the private sector and foreign aid.

**5. Driving Institutional Reform to Create Centralized Management Authority.** Critical to any maturation of the homeland security enterprise is an urgent need to reform the DHS management structure. DHS was created as, and remains, a weak institution with little effective central authority. As a result, the Secretary has significant de jure responsibility but little practical de facto authority. Indeed, the

Secretary is often unable to achieve effective change within DHS save through the force of personality and lacks sufficient budgetary control within the department.

If DHS—and the enterprise for which it is responsible—is to become a mature, functioning institution, that needs to change. Indeed, among other things, DHS should work to centralize its procurement and acquisition process; better link policy to planning, budget, and execution; and build the capacity to take a more forward-looking approach to homeland security.

### **A Strategic Vision for DHS.**

DHS has come a long way since it was first stood up in 2003. Nevertheless, major issues and challenges remain. DHS does not need a head-to-toe makeover, but it does need to address specific issues that will greatly affect its efficiency, credibility, functioning, and overall reputation on Capitol Hill.

By addressing these key reforms, Secretary Napolitano can help build a strong and meaningful strategic vision for DHS in the Administration's second term.

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